



Capitol Report
by
Senator Gary Stevens

Hello again from Juneau. The first session of the Thirty-first Alaska State Legislature, and my nineteenth year in state office, is underway. There are over a dozen new legislators and a new governor and administration this year, but the major goal, and the one thing that we must do before adjournment, remains the same: pass the budget. Through this column, I will keep you updated on our progress with the budget, as well as many other items coming before us, in the weeks ahead.

31st Legislature Committee Assignments

I am serving as Chair of the Senate Education Committee this term. I am also Chair of the Legislative Council, which is a joint-committee of Senate and House members that governs the Legislature's internal business and meets throughout the year. In addition, I am a member of the Health and Social Services Committee and anticipate appointments to the Senate Finance Committee's budget subcommittees soon.

Fiscal Year 2020 Budget

To meet a statutory deadline, the governor released a \$11.5 billion preliminary FY '20 budget to the legislature in December. This budget is based on oil price forecast of \$64 per barrel, leaving a projected deficit of \$1.6 billion. The governor's revised budget is due by the second week of February. His goal is to balance the budget without new revenue measures such as income and sales taxes, so we expect him to propose steep cuts throughout the state's departments and agencies.

You will see many changes to the governor's budget as it is debated by lawmakers. Both the Senate and House Finance Committees will take public testimony on the budget as part of the process. Please check with the Legislative Information Office (LIO) near you for scheduling details.

As always, I welcome your input on the budget and any other matter coming before the legislature.

PFD Payback Legislation

One of the biggest topics this session is the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD). As you may recall, three consecutive years of dividends that did not follow the traditional formula was a major issue in last year's elections. The governor has pledged to not only follow the usual PFD formula, but

also payback money withheld from the past PFDs. He has introduced two bills (Senate Bill 23 and Senate Bill 24) allowing Alaskans who received a dividend in 2016 and are eligible for 2019 to get an extra \$1,061 this year. Those who got a dividend in 2017 and are eligible for a PFD in 2020 will receive an additional \$1,289 that year. Those who got a 2018 dividend and are eligible for a 2021 dividend would get an extra \$1,328 in 2021.

SB 23 and SB 24 were referred to the Senate State Affairs Committee for initial consideration. House companion bills are also expected to be introduced. Vigorous debate on the PFD payback bills is likely as they work through the legislature.

Shellfish Enhancement Project Legislation

Among the legislation I am working on this year is SB 22. This bill would allow for large-scale enhancement projects for shellfish. Currently, all such projects are permitted under a research permit and are of limited size and scope. Passage of the bill would allow the Department of Fish and Game to manage shellfish enhancement projects and establish guidelines for new permits.

SB 22 has been referred to the Senate Resources Committee for consideration. Hearing dates have yet to be announced.

Senate Majority Online Survey

The Senate Majority welcomes your participation in this year's eleven question online poll. The questions cover areas including resource development, education funding and public safety. You can find the survey at <https://www.alaskasenate.org/2020/priorities/2019-senate-poll/>

Senate District P Staff

My Capitol office is staffed by talented and hardworking individuals again this year. All of them have several years of experience with our Senate District.

Tim Lamkin is back for a thirteenth session with the office. He will serve as the Aide to the Senate Education Committee, as well as work on personal legislation and other duties.

Doug Letch is in his nineteenth year in the office. He will continue to work on constituent concerns and communications, track the Senate HSS Committee, work on my personal legislation and handling scheduling.

Katrina Matheny is also in her nineteenth year in the office. Among her many tasks is serving as Aide to Leg Council and following the budget.

You can reach us in Juneau at 1-800-821-4925 or (907) 465-4925.

Additionally, veteran staffer Teri Robl is working in Senate District P's Homer office throughout the year. She is available to help you with any matters involving state government. You can reach Teri at (907) 235-0690.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff if we can be of assistance to you with matters involving state agencies.

Other Contact Information

My mailing address is: 120 4th Street, State Capitol, Room 3, Juneau, AK 99801.

You can e-mail me at Sen.Gary.Stevens@akleg.gov

Legislative Information Offices Are a Great Resource

LIOs can help you follow bills, take part in teleconferences, offer testimony on legislation and contact lawmakers throughout the session. You can also pick up a PFD application at your local LIO, and, by texting any bill number to 1-559-245-2549, the LIO will send a status update to your mobile device.

The Cordova LIO can be reached at (907) 424-5461. It is staffed by Nancy Bird.

The Homer LIO can be reached at (907) 235-7878. It is staffed by Amber Corey.

The Kenai LIO can be reached at (907) 283-2030. It is staffed by MaryBea Byrne and Heather Prisk.

The Kodiak LIO can be reached at (907) 486-8116. It is staffed by Heather Fincher.

Tracking the Alaska Legislature

You can follow the work of the Senate Majority on the Internet at www.alaskasenate.org/2020. The site provides much information on our efforts and our membership.

Alaska's public television system produces Gavel Alaska, which broadcasts live and recorded coverage of floor sessions and committee hearings. The programming is also on the Internet at <http://www.360north.org/>.

AlaskaLegislature.tv offers live coverage of meetings from all of the Capitol's committee rooms. This service is provided by the legislature.

You can also access information on any bills and resolutions introduced during the 31st Alaska Legislature through the Bill Action and Status Inquiry System (BASIS) on the Internet at <http://www.akleg.gov/basis/Home/BillsandLaws>.

PFD Application Period Underway

You can apply for the 2019 Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) now through Saturday, March 31st. The easiest way to apply is via the PFD Division's website at www.pfd.alaska.gov. If you are applying by mail, I highly recommend you send your application by certified mail and request a return receipt to ensure its arrival at the PFD office.

Help with the Federal Government

The members of Alaska's Congressional Delegation can assist you with matters involving the federal government. All have offices in-state.

Congressman Don Young's Anchorage office can be reached at (866) 990-5979.

Senator Lisa Murkowski's Anchorage office can be reached at (877) 829-6030.

Senator Dan Sullivan's Anchorage Office can be reached at (907) 271-5915.

Thank you for reading this edition of the *Capitol Report*, and, as always, thanks to Senate District P's media for helping me keep you informed through this column.